

Night

A Review

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By Elie Wiesel. Bantam Books, New York, 1982, 109 pp.

In *Night*, written by Elie Wiesel, winner of the 1986 Nobel Peace Prize for literature, has, for such a small book, a very large reputation. I hasten to mention, however, the Bantam Books edition I am reviewing boasts the complete text of the original hardcover, of which "NOT ONE WORD HAS BEEN OMITTED." A. Alvarez, reviewing for *Commentary*, wrote "As a human document, *Night* is almost unbearably painful, and certainly beyond criticism." And while I too am not here to criticize, in the course of examining, I do wish to question. For there are many odd and contradictory things in this book. And if you do not come to it with obedient reverence, you will find those things readily.

Mr. Wiesel tells us about his family, his father and mother who ran the family business, and his three sisters Hilda, Béa, and Tzipora. This book, in fact, is dedicated to the latter. [\[1\]](#) Even before mention of his family, however, we are introduced to Moshe the Beadle, a master at the Hasidic synagogue of Sighet, the town in Transylvania where Elie grew up. Elie wants to undertake studies of the Zohar, the cabbalistic books, which contain secrets of Jewish mysticism. In an ensuing conversation, Moshe tells Elie:

"There are a thousand and one gates leading into the orchard of mystical truth. Every human being has his own gate. We must never make the mistake of wanting to enter the orchard by any gate but our own. To do this is dangerous for the one who enters and also for those who are already there."

And this is revelatory in more ways than one. For it perhaps serves not only as an overview regarding studies of the Kabbala, but the journey Elie will be describing regarding his experiences of the Jewish Holocaust; descriptions where "mystical" truth often becomes the touchstone of what he is striving for. The "gate" would be his personal experience, the "orchard," the actual events themselves. If what is now being said about Elie is true, that he assumed the identity of another person, that he is not the person he pretends to be, then woe to him, for he has broken with the advice given by his own master, creating great danger for himself as well as for others.

A ready example of employing the wrong gate to enter the orchard is Elie's use of Moshe's testimony to set the stage. It begins this way: one day in the life of Sighet, "they" (the Hungarian authorities) expell all *foreign Jews*, Moshe the Beadle being one of these. Moshe is crammed into a cattle train by Hungarian police and shipped to Poland. Once across the Polish frontier the Gestapo take charge, immediately loading Moshe and other foreign Jews onto trucks to be taken to a forest. Once there, the condemned are required to dig their own graves, whereafter the Gestapo – "without passion, without haste" – undertake a systematic execution. Each is shot in the neck with a bullet, while the babies are thrown in the air as "target practice" for the machine guns. Moshe, however, is merely shot in the leg... "and taken for dead." [\[2\]](#) Hence, he escapes... one presumes on foot, all the way back to Sighet. When he gets there, his fellow Jews don't believe his story, including Elie. After all, despite Moshe's reputation as a member of the Hasidic synagogue, the claim he was miraculously saved to return on a wounded leg all the way through Slovakia and Hungary to Transylvania in order to tell the story of... "his death," must

have appeared nothing less than exotic.^[3] And it must have appeared at least ironic to Elie, who describes him earlier as “a past master in the art of making himself insignificant.” Now Moshe wants to be other than insignificant, that is, more significant, risking his life to warn others while there is still time. But the question is not whether this man has changed his character, but the character of a story about wanton murder against “foreign” Jews when so many “native” Jews were left in peace. Now this “foreign” Jew who returns to what should be arrest and a second expulsion is allowed to walk the streets in plain day without further ado.



Elie Wiesel at the Time 100 Gala, 3 May 2010.

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In fact, according to Elie, there is no further disturbance for anyone, including Moshe, a full one and a half years. Not until the Spring of 1944 when Admiral Horthy is forced to ask one of the leaders of the Nyilas Party to form a new government allowing the Fascists come to power. Now the Germans are granted permission to station troops in the country and within a few days they suddenly appear at Sighet. At first all is well, some even billeting in Jewish homes and acting friendly. But then they lower the boom with harsh decrees and designated ghettos. Not to mention deportation. In a spirit of cooperation it is the Hungarian and Jewish police who move the Jews into the Big Ghetto, followed by the Jewish Council which takes the final step of transferring them to the main synagogue and then the train station. Once there, it is now the Hungarian Police, assisted by the Gestapo, who load them onto cattle cars bound for what is at first an unknown destination.

The train stops at Kaschau, on the Czech border, and it is only now the Jews realize they will not remain in their native Hungary. Only now, when it is “too late,” are their eyes opened. Elie tells us this because as recently as their stay at the Big Ghetto they might have escaped, the ghetto being unguarded, but the Jews stayed nevertheless thinking the Germans would not have time to expel them, the front was too close, et cetera. Now they are to cross into Czechoslovakia where they soon find themselves at

Auschwitz. And surprisingly, no one had ever heard this name before. As the train arrives, a certain Madame Schächter, who had become hysterical on four separate occasions crying about flames and fire and furnaces where none were to be seen, now cries out a fifth time that flames are leaping from a tall chimney into the black sky.^[4] And this time her visions are apparently real. Adding to the scene is an abominable odor and odd-looking characters dressed in striped shirts and black trousers who enter the wagon beating people with truncheons, yelling for everyone to evacuate the cars quickly. Maybe to insure they do not end up somewhere else. For soon we discover these prisoners are somehow no longer at Auschwitz, but nearby Birkenau. Not that there is any difference. They are still confronted by the sight of flames and the scent of burning flesh.

At Birkenau, along about midnight, with SS men every six feet, “tommy guns” at the ready, Elie and his father are permanently to be separated from Elie’s mother and sisters.^[5] The men are formed in columns of fives and while they are so doing, an unknown prisoner comes telling what is in store for them... at Auschwitz (sic?). “Haven’t you heard about it?” And because they have not, he tells them. “See that chimney over there? See it? Do you see those flames?... You’re going to be burned. Frizzled away. Turned into ashes.” And here my readers you will be astounded to realize is the modus Elie thought proper and fitting to propound for his Nobel Peace Prize winning novel: flames, not gas, but flames!^[6]

There is thought of revolt then and there but the older ones beg the younger ones not to do “anything foolish.” So they instead march toward a square where they encounter “the notorious Dr. Mengele.” And here Elie may be expressing a post-war attitude or maybe it is an indication the notoriety of the doctor was simply greater than the place where he worked. In any event, Elie describes him as having a cruel face, but not devoid of intelligence. To complete the picture he is wearing a monocle and holds a conductor’s baton. And he actually addresses Elie, asking his age. To be sure, it is surprising a man of his stature would intercede in such matters, even to the point of becoming chatty. For he also asks if Elie is in good health and what he does for a living. And it is just as surprising Elie has the nerve to answer these questions falsely. For his pains he is directed to the left. As is his father. But lo, they soon learn this means the crematories! Not the indoor crematories Madame Schächter raved about, but a ditch with gigantic flames!

At this juncture we return to an aspect of Moshe’s incredible story, only this time it is Elie who is telling us: a lorry delivering babies. A full load of them. He sees it with his own eyes – babies thrown into the flames! But gruesome as this pit is with its large, leaping flames, this is not their pit. There is an even larger one for adults. And it is so terrible Elie wonders if he is awake. He pinches himself to make sure. For his part, the father is sorry Elie couldn’t have gone with his mother. We learn that apparently, despite specific orders women had to go one way and men another, several boys Elie’s age (he is 15) somehow and nevertheless went with their mothers. Naturally, we wonder how this could happen? Could it be the Germans were lax in their strictures or were they simply not paying attention? Both seem improbable. Elie speaks of wanting to run to the electric wire and electrocute himself rather than “suffer a slow agony in the flames.” Apparently, he thinks there is a chance for this. And we can’t be sure, for he says nothing about the guards. His father meanwhile, weeping, recites the Kaddish, a prayer for the dead. This makes Elie angry. Why should he bless the name of God, a Lord of the Universe who is silent? Here one might counsel Elie not to make matters worse by blaspheming the All-Powerful and Terrible. Something bad might happen. And we see it almost does. Closer and closer Elie and his father march toward the ditch and its leaping flames. And oddly, nothing is said of being forced there, of

guards beating them forward with truncheons or whips. They are not even shouted at. It is instead like a dream. Maybe Elie is dreaming? Closer, and closer they go: twenty paces, then fifteen. The inferno's heat rises up and by now must be stifling. Ten steps, eight steps, seven. It is like a funeral march, not forced, suggestive of trance. Odd too, is the fact Elie's teeth are chattering, not from the cold obviously, so we suppose this is from nervousness. Four steps, three steps. And now the pit is directly in front of them, right there in front, and they are not even singed nor withered by what must be tremendous, overwhelming heat, but instead Elie retains the presence of mind and the gathering strength to think he might still break from the ranks and make it to the barbed wire. But suddenly it is not necessary. At the last moment he, his father and their remaining comrades are miraculously ordered to make a quick turn to the left and proceed to the barracks. They are saved! But what's this? Like the odd ratcheting of a broken mechanism, it appears Elie and his father were not at the edge of the pit after all. For when the order comes, somehow they are again two steps away and not quite there. Still, it was a close call.

The blows that were not in evidence forcing prisoners into the flaming pit now rain down volubly to encourage those who survived to go to the barber to get their haircut! And the people wielding the truncheons are fellow prisoners. Not only is Elie's hair cut with clippers, but his whole body is shaved. He and his companions are all the while naked, carrying only their original belt and shoes. And apparently they are still naked afterward as they wander into the courtyard meeting old friends and acquaintances. Some are joyful and some are weeping. And Elie admits to something that would become more and more pronounced as his story progresses, viz., that those who were dead and departed "no longer touched even the surface of our memories." They would speak of them, but with little concern for their fate. Elie tells us why: because their senses are blunted. Because "everything was blurred as in a fog." Or a dream? In any event, it was no longer possible to grasp anything. Self-preservation, self-defense, pride – all had deserted them.

At five in the morning they are beaten once more, and made to run naked through icy winds with their shoes and belts to yet another barracks, where disinfection is waiting for them in the form of a barrel of petrol. Everyone is soaked in it. Picturing how they did this requires some imagination. Then everyone takes a hot shower. And what comes out isn't gas, but real water for genuine cleaning. All at high speed mind you – no wasting water! Now they are made to run to another barracks where they receive their prison clothes, to discover nothing fits! But unlike the usual G.I. lament where a soldier must adapt to the clothes he is issued, these prisoners are allowed to swap clothes and make the necessary adjustments.

In case the reader has gotten the wrong idea, Elie describes an SS officer with fleshy lips and "the odor of the Angel of Death" who tells everyone they are at Auschwitz... a concentration camp. You can nearly imagine some editor who has advised this, e.g., stop the descriptions making Auschwitz appear like a country club and get back to the evil of those murderous Germans. So now we have Elie reading crime not only on the SS man's brow, but also in the pupils of his eyes. And we know Elie is not being technical because any book on the human visual system will tell you that the pupil is the aperture in the iris that controls the amount of light entering the eye, where the larger the diameter the more light rays reach the edges of the lens, thereby reducing the quality of the image. Rather than reading evil there, the best that can be inferred is that the SS man's pupils were dilated because the room was dark. But apart from the dilated pupils, the SS man is certainly focused on his topic of discussion. For he tells them Auschwitz is not a convalescent home. It is a place of work. And if one doesn't work they will "go straight to the furnace." Not to the gas chambers, but directly to the crematory! "Work or the crematory..." This is

what Elie quotes the SS man as saying. And it is again apparent the mention of gas chambers is avoided in preference to the word “furnace.” Why? Speculation suggests this might be because up until the time of Edith Stein’s beatification in 1987, Elie Wiesel had been attempting to introduce the word “Holocaust” into our vocabulary (from the Hebrew *ola*, i.e., burnt offering). The twenty-fifth anniversary edition I am reviewing was printed in 1986. Controversy at the time of Edith Stein’s beatification apparently persuaded him to use the word “Shoah” (from Isaiah 47:11, meaning “disaster”).^[7] I leave it to the reader to determine if more modern editions mention “gas chambers” in addition to crematories.

Returning to our story, we again find force being used for unusual purposes. For we have a scene where ten gypsies join a lone gypsy wielding whips and truncheons to force everyone outside into the spring sunshine. One wonders why prisoners must be forced to do this? Naturally we assume spring sunshine is preferable to the inside of a barracks. But maybe they have an intimation of the short march and coming confusion? For they are formed into ranks of five and marched through the gates between electric wires. And near or on the electric wires there are a series of white placards brandishing a death’s head with this caption: “Warning. Danger of death.” And the irony is not lost on Elie, who has been telling us all along they are in a death camp! The gypsies are soon replaced by SS who march the prisoners outside the barbed wire of the camp, and now there is some uncertainty whether this is a march of half an hour or only a few moments before they reach the barbed wire of another camp: Auschwitz! Yes, that’s right. They were in Auschwitz which they left to enter another camp which is also Auschwitz. Elie is obviously confused and I wonder if his editors are so mesmerized by the sanctity of his descriptions there has been no attempt to correct this anomaly. For the obvious correction is that Elie has left Auschwitz for nearby Birkenau, else re-entered Auschwitz through another gate. For he specifically mentions an iron door with the inscription: “Work is liberty!,” claiming this is Auschwitz.^[8] But then he confuses his reader again by saying this camp is better than Birkenau! He was at Auschwitz, the SS man with the fleshy lips and the odor of death tells him they are at Auschwitz, they leave Auschwitz and enter... Auschwitz! How did this glaring confusion get past the editors?

We learn Auschwitz was better than Birkenau because of its concrete buildings and gardens. Not to mention hygiene. At the entrance to one of the prison blocks, Elie is made to wait his turn to go into the showers. From what we know about how the Germans used showers, we think this is the end, but no, not at all. It is Elie himself who tells us the showers were a compulsory formality at the entrance “to all these camps.” Even when passing from one to the other several times a day, e.g., from Birkenau to Auschwitz, from Auschwitz to Birkenau, you had to go through the baths each time. Yet, pleasant as that seems, all is not wine and roses. It is in fact a pretext for complaint. And this is because after the nice, hot shower, they were forced to shiver in the night air. But the case Elie makes for this doesn’t stack up. Just a short while ago, Elie and his comrades were marched over in the Spring sunshine, the march took only a few moments or half hour at the most, whereafter they queued at the prison block to get a shower and now it is night. One of two things must be true: they waited a long time for their shower or they spent a long time in the shower, or possibly both. Either way, forget the old adage, for here time passes quickly when you’re *not* having fun! Their clothes they had to leave behind in “the other block,” and since this is the first block they are supposedly entering once reaching Auschwitz, one must imagine they walked naked all the way from Birkenau! But I think instead there was an undressing process at Auschwitz Elie has failed to mention. What he does mention is that time has passed even more quickly and it is now nearly midnight before he and his comrades are ordered to run, not to get clothes, but to go to bed.

Next morning after a good night's sleep, the prisoners are able to wash, get new clothes and drink black coffee. As a point of reference you can read *The Forgotten Soldier* by Guy Sajer and know this is a time on the Eastern Front when German soldiers were eating grass for lack of supplies. What they wouldn't have given for some coffee! You need only make such comparisons to realize the prisoners' life was somewhat gentle by comparison. The German soldier was constantly exposed to death, lived in the same uniform month after month, and rarely got a bath, hot or otherwise. Except for the dishonor, some soldiers might have been glad to trade places. And think. Instead of some muddy ditch or foxhole, Elie tells us his comrades didn't have to leave the relative comfort of their barrack until ten a.m. – so that it could be cleaned. Outside, they chatted with fellow comrades in the warm sunshine. At noon, they are brought a plate of thick soup. Again by way of contrast, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn tells us about the food in the Soviet camps: gruel with salted carrots September till June, groats in June and shredded nettles in July. At other times there might be cabbage. There was also fish, but it was mostly bones because the flesh was boiled off leaving only a little meat on the tails and heads.^[9] Who had the better system? Both the German and the Russian camps had a bread ration, but it must be remembered that while the Gulag was meant to hold prisoners for political crimes, the German camps allegedly existed for purposes of extermination. Something to ponder.

Elie tells us despite his hunger he doesn't eat it because he was still "the spoiled child," so his father takes his ration instead. Then they take a siesta. Elie now begins to think the SS officer of the other day was lying: Auschwitz is not a concentration camp, not a death camp where if you do not work you die, but in fact a rest home!

We now come to a description which, in light of recent controversy, should be of particular interest. For this is where Elie tells us how he got his prisoner's tattoo. The scene unfolds as follows: one fine afternoon a line is formed in front of a table with some medical instruments. Three veteran prisoners with needles are assigned to engrave numbers on the arms of the new prisoners. With left sleeve rolled up, Elie tells us he gets his number: A-7713. And the number is important. When at dusk the work units return, greeted by a band playing military marches, roll call is taken. And the SS verifies the tens of thousands of prisoners not by their names but by their numbers. So Elie would have been required to have a number at Auschwitz. No number, no Auschwitz. A-7713, left arm. Of course any other legitimate number would have served the purpose, but this is the one he says he received. If no number or a false one, we must toss out the whole idea of his ever being at Auschwitz or the factual basis for what he says in *Night*. Why not believe him?

Apart from the harrowing experience at the flaming pit when first arriving, the next three weeks at Auschwitz are really quite good. In the mornings there is black coffee. At noon there is soup. After roll call at 6 p.m., there is bread and margarine. Then the prisoners are free to roam, looking for friends, neighbors and relatives before going to bed by 9 p.m. Elie and his father have nothing to do but sleep a great deal in the afternoon and at night. Their only worry is to in fact stay at Auschwitz "as long as possible" and avoid being moved. How? Simply by identifying themselves as other than skilled laborers, for "laborers" (i.e., unskilled laborers) "were being kept till the end."

But soon these good days end. A first indication is when the cell block leader is replaced for being too humane, replaced by someone savage, ably assisted by monstrous attendants. This turn of events again causes Elie and his fellow Jews think of their fate, but also of things one doesn't usually expect of a people too proud to believe they are at fault for anything. A fellow Hasidic, Akiba Drumer, one of solemn

voice, is given to say God is testing them to find out whether they can dominate their base instincts and “kill the Satan within us,” while others speak “of the sins of the Jewish people,” but also their future deliverance. This reminds one of the occasional admissions of Jews such as Bernard Lazarre, a French historian who, well before the holocaust, understood national uprisings and the expulsion of Jews in consequence of negative characteristics the Jews themselves possessed. And it also reminds of Edith Stein, the German philosopher and Carmelite, who spoke of the “fulfillment of the curse which my people have called down upon themselves!” [10] But now, during a period of common suffering, these Jewish prisoners come to a similar understanding.

Eventually Elie, his father and some other prisoners are transferred to Buna. And here Elie makes a striking statement. On the one hand he says Buna looks like it was suffering from an epidemic, but on the other hand he says its sparse population of prisoners were well-clad and walking about seemingly healthy. Once there, they go through the ubiquitous showers, joined by the head of the camp – a man with gray-blue eyes who looks kind and even smiles. He takes an interest in the several children who arrive with the convoy and has food brought for them. The newly arrived, meanwhile, are given new clothes. Even the veteran prisoners admit “Buna’s a very good camp,” yet seem to have misgivings about the building unit. But now we learn what might be behind the niceties of the camp commandant in regard to the children. It seems the head of Elie’s tent, a German, also likes children. And despite having an “assassin’s face,” hands like “wolf’s paws,” and so much fat he could hardly move, he too, brings the children food: bread, soup, and margarine. Elie explains why by assuming the man is a trafficker in children. He assumes he is an homosexual. Why these assumptions? Because later he would learn “there was a considerable traffic in children among homosexuals here...” It is not proven against the German mind you, nor the camp commandant, but for Elie the rumors are sufficient. And I’m sure for many of his readers, too.

Medical inspection seems pretty good – maybe as good or better than what modern-day US military Reservists receive. There are three doctors present and instead of posing questions via some on-line and impersonal form, they ask about the health of a person in person. And then there is a dentist - something not even our modern-day Veterans’ hospitals provide. The only draw-back according to Elie is that the dentist is not looking for decayed teeth but ones that contain gold. Those who have them, like Elie with his gold crown, have their number added to a list. The secretary of the block soon orders him to return to the camp dentist, despite he has no toothache. It seems those with gold teeth are required to have them extracted (without waiting to remove them from their dead skulls!) But on this occasion the dentist is a Czech Jew, and when Elie explains he is not feeling well, the dentist tells him to return when he is feeling better. When Elie returns a week later, he gives the same excuse and is again given a reprieve. But now there is an end to it, for the Germans discover the dentist is running a private traffic of his own and is “thrown in prison,” whence to be hanged. Not gassed, not incinerated, but hanged! And no one replaces him. So Elie gets to keep his gold crown because the Germans don’t afterwards assign a new dentist to extract gold teeth and one wonders if the original Jewish dentist was not only working on his own but without authority?

From time to time Elie tells us something unusual about the psychology of concentration camp life and here divulges an instance involving a work detail headed up by Idek, a bully Kapo. Normally, Elie and his father worked in an electronics warehouse at Buna but this incident occurs at a rail depot where they had to load Deisel engines. Idek breaks out into a frenzy over Elie’s father’s laziness and begins beating him with an iron bar. You can imagine the blows were not light. The father is in fact beaten so badly he

is described as “broke in two,” like a tree struck by lightning, whereupon he collapses. And here is the strange part. Elie describes his anger as not directed towards Idek but wholly against his father “for not knowing how to avoid Idek’s outbreak.” If true, this is indeed bizarre. Elie blames the effects on camp life, but seen from a nature versus nurture viewpoint, one wonders at the boy’s character and what he is made of. One often learns the worst about oneself under conditions of turmoil and stress. And it is not the last of our friend Idek.

Elie would learn something about his comrades, too. Take Franek, for example. Franek, the former student from Warsaw. Franek, a Pole and fellow Jew, who was also their foreman. It now seems that someone else besides the Jewish dentist wants Elie’s gold crown and that person is Franek. Jews, we are told, love gold. And we are reminded of this by Woody Allen of all people, himself Jewish, whose film “Annie Hall” shows actual German newsreel footage of abandoned cars on the outskirts of Paris accompanied by English sub-titles telling us these were Jews attempting to flee the Germans with all their... gold! So who can blame Franek? No longer the sympathetic, intelligent youth, Franek attempts to persuade Elie through his father, savagely thrashing the father every time he marches out of step. Elie tries to teach his father how to march correctly, but it is no good. The father remains unregimented, and for that, continues to receive beatings until finally, Elie consents to give up his crown. By now, however, Franek wants a ration of bread for having been kept waiting – this, to go to the famous dentist from Warsaw who’s going to do the extraction. It’s not much of a fee really and the old adage applies: you get what you pay for. The famous dentist pulls the tooth in a lavatory with a rusty spoon! And this is a Jewish, not a German dentist.

Fresh on the heels of this tale of the lavatory and rusty spoons comes a story that is now salacious, one that is meant to titillate. It again involves Idek. Picture a pleasant Sunday, normally a day of rest, but Idek won’t hear of it. Everyone to the warehouse, which is outside the camp. But maybe Idek has relented, for Elie finds there is not much to do there but go for little walks. Elie’s little walk takes him to the back of the building where he hears noises from a room next door. Next door is obviously their own barracks inside the camp for next thing we know, Elie is able to spy on Idek and a half-naked Polish girl on a mattress in the building from whence they were forced to leave. It is odd Elie is able to return there, and evidently comical the sight he is witnessing, too. So much so, he laughs out loud and draws Idek’s unwanted attention. Soon, he is made to lie on a box during a special roll call to receive twenty-five lashes, during which he passes out. Doused with water and brought before Idek, the latter tells Elie the punishment was for his curiosity and that he will receive five times as many lashes “if you dare tell anyone what you saw!” And he says this during the same roll call in front of some hundred prisoners who presumably are within earshot. Or did Elie forget the scene he had painted? By now we are thinking this happens too often.

And that is not all. For another thing that happens often and by now catches our eye is the fact mass murder in flaming pits or crematories is not the only way the Germans choose to dispatch the undesirable. Those who commit actual infractions are curiously handled individually and in the old-fashioned way: by hanging! The Czech Jew who was hanged for improper dental practices is apparently not an anomaly. And we know this because Elie tells us about gallows erected in the center of the camp for other such executions. And these events are quite formal. He describes one that occurs while all ten thousand prisoners are at roll-call. The gate to the camp is opened and they find themselves surrounded by a “section” of SS, one soldier every three paces.^[11] The hanging concerns a youth from Warsaw accused of stealing. He must now die as a warning and example, but also because it’s the law.

Apparently there is a semblance of law even in a concentration camp. Despite Elie telling us the youth has spent three years in various camps, he is nevertheless described as “strong,” and “well-built.” And it is odd, if anything any longer can be, that Elie is overwhelmed by the sight of this one impending death by hanging when he says he is otherwise no longer troubled by the thousands who die daily at Auschwitz and Birkenau in the crematory ovens. And his reason is a matter of speculation, but I infer it is because aside from the one incident of the flaming pits, he does not see these thousands of deaths but only imagines them. By contrast, the true sight of someone who is to hang is more poignant and real. And the odd twist is that even after the youth is able to shout an appeal for liberty and a curse upon Germany, following the execution, the assembly is nevertheless commanded to bare and cover their heads as a gesture of respect. Then the prisoners are all made to pass by the dead body and look at the hanged youth full in the face, to see his dimmed eyes and lolling tongue, as if this was to make a special impression when thousands were dying every day by more gruesome means for no particular infraction.

There is yet another hanging into which Elie delves at length concerning a boy who was an assistant to a Dutch Oberkapo of the fifty-second cable unit. The boy was known as a *pipel*, a child with a refined and beautiful face, and anyone who has read Oscar Wilde’s “Portrait of Mr. W.H.,” is struck by certain similarities. After the sabotage of the electric power station at Buna, the Gestapo accuse a certain Dutchman, whereupon they torture and send him to Auschwitz. The *pipel*, however, also tortured, is instead sentenced to death at Buna, along with two others. Consequently, three gallows are erected and it is the same cumbersome process once again: the SS en masse, machine guns at the ready, surrounding ten thousand prisoners at a mandatory assembly. But what’s this? Elie tells us the SS seem more disturbed than usual. Why? Because it is no light matter to hang a young boy in front of thousands of spectators! The three are hanged at the same time and in the same primitive manner the Italians used for the Libyans in 1931: by forcing them to mount chairs placing a noose around their necks, then tipping the chairs over. Again the token of respect, again the forced march past the victims. But during this pass and review the prisoners see the two adults have perished but the *pipel*, “being so light,” is still alive, struggling in his noose and experiencing a slow agony on the brink of death. If the SS were reluctant to begin with, what are they feeling now? But Elie doesn’t tell us. What he does say is that night the soup tasted of corpses. Corpses? It is a poor analogy. It also poses a strange contrast to the aftermath of the death of the youth from Warsaw where Elie said the soup tasted “excellent.” Which is less an artistic twist than a psychological exposé.

It is now the eve of Rosh Hashanah, the end of summer, the last day of the Jewish year. Everyone is given thick soup but no one touches it. You would think Elie and his fellow prisoners are starving, and at other times they are, or he says they are, but this time they are willing to forgo their meal until after prayers. Thousands of Jews gather silently in the place of assembly, the same place as the hangings, to pray. Unlike the Jews of *Exodus* who felt obliged to ask Pharaoh to let them leave Egypt so they could worship their god elsewhere, these Jews ask nothing but to gather and pray uninhibited and unharmed. We are told there are the usual ten thousand, to include the heads of blocks, Kapos, the “functionaries of death.” And they are there to “Bless the Eternal...” But Elie questions this blessing. Why should he bless the Eternal who “had had thousands of children burned in His pits” (my underscore), who “kept six crematories working day and night, on Sundays and feast days,” and who “created Auschwitz, Birkenau, Buna, and so many factories of death?” Elie tells God He has betrayed these people, allowing them to be tortured, butchered, gassed and burned when previously He took action with Adam and Eve, Noah’s generation, and the city of Sodom. And while Elie reviles the fact the assembly is praying to God despite

these things, he does not allow himself to ponder why God would indeed act in those biblical instances, yet not here and now. Still, the reader must wonder, as might any person who does not feel God is God for him alone, a personal god for a chosen people. For Elie, however, if God is not doing the Jews' bidding then God is no longer God but something less to where, feeling stronger than the Almighty, Elie is now the accuser and God the accused. And this is curiously reminiscent of that passage in *Exodus* where Moses tells God to turn from His wrath against the people of Israel and repent of evil.^[12] More than "chutzpa," it is blasphemy, the unbridled arrogance of a Rashkolnikov who presumes everything and becomes something less.

It is now winter, 1944. Elie and his comrades are given winter clothes, thicker striped shirts which the veterans nevertheless deride. Of course there are some people who will appreciate nothing. On Christmas and New Year's there is no work and the prisoners are afforded a slightly thicker soup. And possibly there are some who gripe about this, too. But here Elie must be commended for at least telling us of these things, for we are able to glimpse the Germans as human, respecting the birth of Jesus and sharing with those less fortunate.

Toward the middle of January, Elie's right foot begins to bother him and he goes to have it examined. The examination is performed by an eminent Jewish doctor, also a prisoner. The doctor insists on an operation. If Elie's time-table is correct, we know the Russians are within a week or so of seizing the camp, the Germans are on the verge of evacuation, but the Jewish doctor nevertheless proposes surgery, with no concern for hardship in terms of medical facilities, anesthetics, bandages, etc. Elie in fact tells us he is given a bed with white sheets and "the hospital was not bad at all." In addition, the patients in the hospital are given good bread and thicker soup.^[13] Elie is even able to send his father some of this bread. There is a Hungarian Jew who is there for dysentery, mere skin and bones, but rather than let him die, the Germans are treating him to make him well. All the while, Elie has the chutzpa to again mention selections, telling us the hospital has them "more often than outside." On hearing this, however, one gets the impression the true significance is that here in the hospital, with limited beds and large demand, only the more serious cases are able to remain. If death is the purpose, why bother to treat in the first place? And yet despite treatment, the Hungarian Jew exclaims "Germany doesn't need sick Jews"! He therefore tells Elie he should "get out of the hospital before the next selection!" The thought must occur to Elie that if he is being treated, he is needed, and being a thinking person, realizes there may be a personal motive behind the Hungarian Jew's advice. For in fact he decides to stay. And good thing, too. The surgery is performed the very next day. And when it is over, the doctor is able to tell Elie everything is o.k. He will now be allowed to remain in the hospital the next two weeks, will rest comfortably, eat well and relax his body and nerves. Not only that but he will be up and walking like everyone else in a fortnight. Marvelous news, no doubt, to a concentration camp inmate expecting death at any moment from selections lurking round every corner.

But lo, on the same day Elie gets the prognosis about his foot, comes word of evacuation. Not that Elie need worry, for his doctor tells him hospital patients will not be evacuated but can remain in the infirmary. Immediately, the Hungarian Jew predicts all invalids will be summarily killed, sent to the crematory as part of a final liquidation. What Elie doesn't tell us and what the Hungarian obviously doesn't know is that all of Birkenau's crematories have already been shut down, the last being Kremas II, III, and V which, according to official records, ceased operating on 30 October 1944.^[14] But truth doesn't stop rumors, nor Elie's speaking of them as if they might be taken seriously. Same for another rumor the camp will be blown up before the Russians arrive. All is belied by the fact Elie tells us death

does not worry him. What worries him is being separated from his father. And this is because they had already suffered “so much,” borne “so much,” that now was not the time. Given what he has written earlier, one wonders. Why is he telling us this? But a few pages earlier, when he was describing the Allied bombing at Buna where his father was working, he was telling us despite the risk to his father he was glad about the bombing because it meant destruction and revenge. Now he is telling us when the Russians are coming he is worried about being separated from his father. What’s this leading up to? Elie runs in the snow on his bad foot with no shoe to find his father. What shall we do, he asks him? Elie is confident he can get the Jewish doctor to have his father entered as a patient or a nurse and thereby fall within the rule of allowing those in the infirmary to remain behind. Soft beds, nourishing food, clean sheets, and all they would have to do is wait for the Russians. And it is not a matter of Elie worrying about liquidation or the camp being blown up because he has already and to his credit refused believing what people saying these things have previously said about hospital selections.^[15] So rather than the soft beds, clean sheets and nourishing food waiting for liberation, he instead suggests he and his father “be evacuated with the others.” That is, he suggests, even with his bad foot, he and his father leave with the retreating Germans to remain prisoners at another camp in Germany! People have made much to do over this and I think they should. It is nothing less than an admission despite all the hubbub about cruelty and mistreatment, despite the descriptions of forced labor and executions, remaining with the Germans was preferable to all other options – including being liberated by the Russians. This is telling. And what it tells is that the Germans may not have been so bad after all.^[16]

Elie and his comrades are given double rations of bread and margarine for their journey. They were also allowed to take as many shirts and other clothes from the camp store. Elie in fact tells how next morning everyone is in multiple garments, looking like they are at a masquerade! Those who recognize the name Austin Burke, a Miami clothier of the 1960’s, remember how he used to advertise men’s suits on television ads this way. Burke or an assistant would come on screen with multiple suits one over the other, stripping them off as Burke would go through purple prose on the virtues of each. In the same way Elie describes these prisoners as “poor mountebanks, wider than they were tall, more dead than alive.” That last comment is perhaps necessary. Elie throws this in because it is perhaps beginning to look too good, because we know they are alive and on double rations, willing to go with the Germans. And there is even a German spirit in the block leader who orders only an hour before evacuation that the block be cleaned from top to bottom, washed in every corner, so that the liberating Russians will realize “there were men living here and not pigs.”

Departing Buna, the Jews arrive at Gleiwitz, where they are hurriedly installed in their new barracks by the Kapos. In their haste to occupy this refuge, this “gateway to life” as Elie calls it, he also describes how they “walked over pain-racked bodies” and “trod on wounded faces” to get inside. Elie and his father are themselves victim to this, as they are thrown to the ground by a rolling tide of humanity. Elie finds he is now in fact crushing someone he knows, a voice from the past, and in his effort to disengage himself, does some mean and horrible things, e.g., digging his nails into others’ faces, and “biting all around.” Elie discovers it is Juliek he has been crushing, the boy from Warsaw who played the violin in the orchestra at Buna. Despite the crush, swollen feet and lack of air, it is not his own life Juliek is concerned for, but his violin. He’s got it with him and is afraid it will be broken.

But before the conversation can continue, Elie must first extricate himself. We learn he is not face down, but face up, and someone is lying on top of him, suffocating him to where he is now unable to breathe either through his nose or mouth. So again he commences to scratch, to tear with his nails into decayed

flesh, yet to no avail. Elie thinks the man on top of him in fact is dead, but isn't sure. Finally, however, he manages to dig a hole – a hole through the wall of dying people, a little hole through which to breathe. Now he calls to his father, who he knows is not far away, and the father, who presumably is also being crushed, answers he is “well!” Elie tries to sleep now, still buried but breathing, when he suddenly hears the sound of a violin. It is Juliek playing a fragment from a Beethoven concerto. And Elie wonders, as the reader must, how when Elie was on top of Juliek and couldn't budge, Juliek got out from under him to play his violin? What miracle allowed this? What flight of fancy? The nice thing of course is that it now allows Elie to trip the light fantastic about Juliek's soul and how it is the bow and how the whole of his life seems to be gliding on the strings, the whole being very beautiful. But despite this beauty Elie again falls asleep and when he awakes this time by the light of day he sees Juliek opposite him, slumped over dead, his violin smashed beside him. And this makes for a sad if wondrous image, something Elie does from time to time for literary effect, even if the image defies reason.

Moving from Gleiwitz, the prisoners continue their journey to Buchenwald, where they are assembled to be counted. And wouldn't you know that right next to where they are standing is the high chimney of a crematory, although by now it hardly makes an impression. They've seen and survived these things before. What really fascinates them, however, is the fact there are hot showers, and beds. The guards in fact have to begin striking the prisoners to maintain order, the prisoners crowding so to get a shower, but to no avail. They obviously believe it is water and not gas that will issue from those showers. Here in the heart of Germany. But now Elie's father is too exhausted to stand in line. He thinks it's the end and drags himself to a snow covered hillock of dead bodies to await the end. Suddenly, interrupting the scene of Elie pleading with his father, of pleading with death itself, there is an air raid siren, the lights go out, and the guards drive everyone into the blocks. The prisoners are only too glad not to have to wait outside in the icy wind, instead letting themselves sink down onto beds arranged in tiers. Even the cauldrons of soup at the entrance to the barracks attracts no one. This reminds us of before. Where formerly they were starving, tearing, biting, even killing for a scrap of bread, suddenly food does not matter to anyone, all they want is sleep.

And here Elie makes another of those less than laudatory revelations. For he tells us he has followed the crowd from where his father was resting at the hillock, where he pleaded with his father to arise and get himself washed before going to the blocks, but left him during the alert to go inside to sleep, not troubling with him further. The father, meanwhile, during the alert and after, was left outside in the snow! On the brink of death. Abandoned. Only on the following day does Elie go back to look for him. This man, this father whose hand he held just the day before when forming up at Buchenwald's assembly place, not wanting to lose him! But now he has already abandoned him to his fate while he slept inside and confesses as he goes to seek him he in fact doesn't want to find him, instead wishing he could “get rid of this dead weight” so he could use all his strength to struggle for his own survival. What happened over the past 12 hours to bring about this change of attitude? Elie has now rested, has been relatively comfortable and has presumably nourished himself from the cauldrons of soup that were at the entrance to the block, but now instead of being refreshed and invigorated, more generous of spirit, is afflicted by avarice and lack of familial fidelity. He tells us he is ashamed for these thoughts, but still it is puzzling, if not disturbing. Now, searching for his father, he finds him at a block where black coffee is being served. Elie gets his father some coffee, asks a number of questions, then says he cannot stay long because the place is to be cleaned and only the sick are allowed to remain. And in the background we begin to comprehend it was the Germans who did what Elie did not, and that is get his father inside, out

of the weather, where he could be sheltered and allowed to survive. And it is another blow, a small one to be sure, adding to an overall picture that the Germans have something else in mind than a systematic plan to kill Jews, even sick ones.

But it is near the end for the father and there is a curious description of him lying in his bunk laid up with dysentery, suddenly raising himself to whisper in Elie's ear where to find the gold and money he buried before leaving their home in Sighet. Elie tries to explain this is not the end, that they would both return together, but the father will not listen. A trickle of saliva mixed with blood comes from his lips, his breath comes in gasps, and when a doctor arrives, Elie pleads he examine his father but the doctor instead insists on an office visit. When Elie brings his father, the doctor announces he can do nothing because it is a case of dysentery and his field is surgery. Returned to the barrack, another doctor comes, but Elie thinks this doctor is just there to "finish off" those who are sick because he hears him shouting that the sick are just lazy and want to stay in bed! And it is just an opinion the doctor wants to finish them off, although Elie tells us he would like to strangle the doctor! And not only the doctor but "the others." In fact, he would like to burn the "whole world," especially his father's murderers. Lest we think he means only the world of the Germans, we learn Elie's father is being beaten by a Frenchman and a Pole, fellow prisoners who cannot stand the fact the father won't drag himself outside to relieve himself. And they not only beat him, but also steal his bread!

Elie knows his father must not drink water, that water for a person with dysentery is poison, but he gives it to him anyway. A week passes this way, however, and the father still lives. The head of the block advises Elie not to give the father his ration of bread and soup but to instead keep it for himself. He says this because it is clear the father is dying, and there is nothing anyone can do. So Elie holds the bread but gives his father soup, only the father wants water, always water, and Elie obliges. But now comes an SS officer on the scene, passing the beds. And apparently this SS officer is disturbed at the noise Elie's father is making begging for water. He tells him to be quiet, but the father continues to call Elie's name, and when the father ignores the officer, the latter deals him a violent blow to the head with his truncheon. Elie does nothing, afraid to move, afraid he too will be struck. After roll call, he climbs down from his bunk to learn the worst, that his father's skull is shattered. He is still alive, but barely. Elie stares at him for an hour, then climbs back into his bunk. At dawn when Elie awakes, he finds his father has been removed, replaced by somebody else, and naturally assumes "they must have taken him... to the crematory." And if he indeed died, this is likely true, for most cases of dysentery are due to micro-organisms, as per typhus which is due to a bacillus, so the burning of bodies rather than their burial, is the recommended practice. Elie laments there were no prayers and no candles, but we are shocked when he admits that in the depths of his being, in the recesses of his conscience, was the basic sentiment "free at last!" Such an expression seems wrong and inhuman. Compare, for example, with Henry Fonda who speaks these same words when carrying the limp body of Sylvia Sidney, escaping from a police sharpshooter who is about to pull the trigger.[\[17\]](#)

Let us consider the time-line for a moment. Elie gives the date of his father's death as 29 January 1945. As a satellite camp to Auschwitz, we suppose Buna was evacuated approximately the same time as Auschwitz, that is, 18 January 1945, whereafter there was a two nights' march to Gleiwitz, where the prisoners stayed for three days. Then there was a train ride to Buchenwald, which required "ten days, and ten nights." Then another week while Elie's father was dying of dysentery. We should now be at 9 February, or later, but Elie tells us his father died during the night of 28 – 29 January. Something is wrong here. But there is something else. The father has dysentery while at Buchenwald and the doctors

wouldn't or couldn't do anything for him. Fellow prisoners beat him and took his bread. The head of the block, someone sympathetic, advises Elie not to waste rations on the father. And finally, an SS officer finishes him off with a blow from his truncheon. So despite the treatment of fellow prisoners, despite dysentery and even the behavior of Elie himself, the blame comes to rest with the Germans. Elie wants us to see it that way. And technically he is right, but later he would try to establish something evil about the soul of the Germans. There is an interesting comparison in Solzhenitsyn's *Ivan Denisovich* when speaking about "Shukov" (i.e., Denisovich). For he speaks of a Soviet warder who pricked himself on the sewing needle Shukov hid in his prisoner's cap when the former snatched the cap off his head during inspection. And the warder became so angry by this "he'd almost smashed Shukov's head in." [18] And this is not to forgive or excuse what the SS officer did to Elie's father but to understand that temper, violence and brutishness was as much a part of gulags as it was a part of concentration camps, the type of people these establishments required or bred, and is therefore less particular and more universal than one might otherwise wish to believe.

On 5 April the prisoners are still at Buchenwald where there is an announcement for all Jews to form at the assembly place. All the children of Elie's block are made to do this, motivated by menaces from block leader Gustav and his truncheon. And there is fear this is finally the end. But on the way to the assembly place some prisoners whisper to the children to return to their barracks, so they won't be shot by the Germans. "Shot" mind you, 600 bullets if none of them miss, 600 bullets that might be used to defend against the approaching Americans, but not gas or the flaming pit, theoretically more efficient for mass killings. The whispers come either from members of the camp resistance organization or those who knew about the plans of such an organization, plans that provide the Jews will not be abandoned or allowed to be liquidated. With several thousand prisoners leaving the camp each day beginning 6 April, there are still some twenty thousand who remain on 10 April, including several hundred children. And on this day all are to be evacuated immediately, whereafter the camp is to be destroyed (Elie quotes the camp commandant as saying Buchenwald is to be "liquidated" but it is obvious what the term really means is the camp would be evacuated and destroyed). As everyone is massed in the huge assembly area, there is suddenly an alert and they all must return to their blocks. Now the evacuation is postponed until 11 April. Elie states those present haven't eaten for six days, save for some bits of grass and potato peelings. And so it is with super-herculean willpower, however undernourished or weakened, while the SS are again moving the prisoners to the assembly point, the resistance rises up and after two hours of what must have been a very unequal battle fit for a Hollywood movie, is nevertheless master of the situation. The SS flee and the resistance is now in charge. And by six that evening the first American tank arrives.

Once liberated, the prisoners' first thought is not of revenge, not even of their families, but to seize and consume Buchenwald's remaining provisions. The following day, approximately 14 April, some of the younger men make their way to Weimar to acquire more food and sleep with women. This is not what you'd expect from starved and emaciated men ravaged by years of concentration camp life. The gratuitous photos we've seen of those who were liberated doesn't make this seem possible. But now we learn just three days after liberation, Elie becomes ill with food poisoning. Very ill, and we wonder if it is the American food or the food they stole from the Germans? Either way, this is puzzling, just like the stories relating to the outbreak of typhus at Bergen-Belsen *after* its liberation by the British. Elie's case is so serious he is transferred to a hospital where he spends the next two weeks on the brink of death. During this time he looks into a mirror, and what he sees is a corpse. Not simply a radically changed man

like Yuri Zhivago after fifteen months as a doctor with the Red partisans, but “a corpse.” And it is just this liberty with modes of expression that defines how he has employed mystical rather than plain truth in describing his ordeal; how if he is pretending to be somebody else he has broken the rules regarding what Moshe the Beadle tried to say about entering the orchard. Yet even now, while viewing “the corpse,” never could he dream the fame and honors that awaited when telling his story, the Nobel Peace Prize and the United States Congressional Gold Medal, to name but a few. Proving life can be good if one isn’t a corpse, but lives to tell the tale.

Notes:

- [1] It is possible that Swedish journalist Sydsvenska Dagbladet, researching in 1986, misidentified Elie as one Lazar Wiesel, inmate number A-7713. True, in *Night*, Elie claims his number at Auschwitz was A-7713, but that he was also an only son; there is no mention of a brother named “Abraham.” Furthermore, Elie Wiesel would have been age 15 in 1944, whereas witness Miklos Gruner claims Lazar Wiesel was 31 in that same year. Was the genesis of Elie’s book in fact something previously written in 1955 by Lazar Wiesel? That is a different matter.
- [2] The distance between the neck and a leg being large, especially at close range, one is not surprised the Germans needed target practice. But killing babies with machine guns seems an absurd matter of over-kill!
- [3] By the Treaty of Trianon, signed 4 June 1920, Croatia-Slavonia, the Territory of Fiume, and Transylvania were lost to Hungary, but Transylvania was restored by Rumania on 30 August 1940.
- [4] In Exodus 19:18 we find: “And Mount Sinai was wrapped in smoke, because the Lord descended upon it in fire; and the smoke of it went up like the smoke of a kiln...” Thus one might infer Madame Schächter is hallucinating about the presence of God.
- [5] Regarding the SS with “tommy guns,” (Thompson submachine guns) one wonders if these are a contingent of the some 50 British volunteers who allegedly served in the Waffen SS during the war?
- [6] MGM’s film *The Search*, released in 1948, starring Montgomery Clift, Ailene MacMahon (and a little Czech boy named Ivan Jandl) has a scene with a young girl who is speaking about her mother being “gassed” at Dachau. And later, there is a scene where Ivan Jandl and other displaced children are being transported in Red Cross trucks who break free and escape the trucks because they smell exhaust gas and believe they are being exterminated. So the idea of gas as a modus operandi was already in the public mind but curiously not in Elie’s mind and we naturally wonder why?

- [7] See Ernst Ludwig Ehrlich, "The Jews Did Not Want to Bring Burnt Offerings," in *Never Forget*, Waltraud Herbstrith, Ed. (Washington : ICS Publications, 1998), p. 129.
- [8] I myself, when retracing the steps of Fred Leuchter in 1998, passed beneath this "inscription," although by then there was no iron door, nor ever seemed to be, just a wrought-iron grill with its Gothic text slogan: *Arbeit Macht Frei*.
- [9] Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* (New York: Bantam Books, 1963), p. 17. Solzhenitsyn's *The Gulag Archipelago* was begun in 1958, the same year Elie Wiesel's *Night* was first published in France. Like Wiesel's book, Solzhenitsyn's claimed eyewitness testimony. However, Solzhenitsyn's massive tome was also supported by the reports, memoirs, and letters of 227 fellow witnesses. Despite its mammoth undertaking as an experiment in literary investigation, covering a 38 year period (1918 – 1956) of torture and murder by the Soviet system, Solzhenitsyn's book did not receive a Nobel Peace Prize, nor was Solzhenitsyn honored with the United States Congressional Gold Medal, the Medal of Liberty, the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the rank of Grand-Croix in the French Legion of Honor, nor an honorary Knighthood from Her Majesty, Queen Elizabeth II of Britain.
- [10] Cited in *Never Forget: Christian and Jewish Perspectives on Edith Stein*, Waltraud Herbstrith, OCD, Editor, translated by Susanne Batzdorff (Washington, D.C.: ICS Publications, 1998), p. 111. The statement is cited by Friedrich Georg Friedmann (in his article "Not Like That! On the Beatification of Edith Stein"), as taken from the third edition of Sr. Waltraud Herbstrith's book *Das wahre Gesicht Edith Steins*.
- [11] A "section" in the French scheme of things – Elie's book was translated from the French by Stella Rodway – is equivalent to our American platoon, roughly 50 men. Fifty men would be hard-pressed to surround ten thousand men at three pace intervals, unless, of course, the ten thousand were themselves hard-pressed!
- [12] The exact quote from *Exodus* 32:12 reads: "Turn from thy fierce wrath, and repent of this evil against thy people." Truly, is there anyone but Jews who presume to tell God to repent of evil?
- [13] In *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*, Solzhenitsyn mentions how "Shukhov" (Ivan Denisovich) dreams of getting sick enough to go to the hospital for a few weeks "even if the soup they gave you was a little thin..." (ibid., p. 23). And this was after the war with no special rationing.
- [14] See *Anatomy of the Auschwitz Death Camp*, edited by Yisrael Gutman and Michael Berenbaum, Indian University Press, 1994, p. 174.
- [15] Elie tells us at the bottom of page 78 that he would learn after the war how those who stayed behind were "quite simply" liberated by the Russians two days after the evacuation.

[16] Knowing scripture, possibly Elie and his father were also remembering how the Jews had believed themselves traduced during the sojourn in the wilderness of Sin, where the people of Israel murmured against Moses and Aaron saying, "Would that we had died by the hand of the Lord in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the fleshpots and ate bread to the full; for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger" (*Exodus*, 16:3). Now, to be fed, they will go into the wilderness with the Germans, not remain according to their own devices and wait for the bread of the Russians.

[17] *You Only Live Once*, MGM 1937, directed by Fritz Lang.

[18] Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* (New York: Bantam Books, 1963) p. 28.

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